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AUTHOR Chope, Robert C.
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ABSTRACT

The emotional fallout from rapid, dramatic job market changes can severely and adversely affect the job search and job change process. It can cause inappropriate, precipitous emotional reactions that can block a job seeker's effectiveness at different times and stages of each job search. This paper demonstrates how individuals can find their way during emotionally difficult, uncertain times. It begins with an update on the new paradigmatic shifts that are taking place in the career world that make emotional balance more essential than ever. Then, there are some examples of counterproductive beliefs that develop during a difficult job search. Finally, the paper advocates the understanding of the importance of one's career identity in eliminating negative emotional reactions like self doubt, fear, rage, anxiety and depression. The material should assist business and career consultants to become sensitive to the emotional issues of the job search process. Career counselors are offered strategies to assist clients with defining and utilizing their career identity while helping job changers discover their own adverse emotional reactions and counterproductive career beliefs. (JDM)

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by

Robert C. Chope

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Exploration of the Emotional Avenues of Career Change

Robert C. Chope, Ph.D.
San Francisco State University

Introduction

As I've pointed out earlier (Chope, 2000) emotions color the job search, job change and job placement process every step of the way, often blocking individual effectiveness. Emotions always have. But, in today's economy, "dot coms" have become "dot bombs" turning to "dot compost." Many unemployed job seekers look to the "not coms" for their future. Ominous newspaper headlines share gloomy reports: unemployment is up, webvan and wine.com are gone, prestigious companies like Goldman Sachs invested poorly. And Compaq merges with Hewlett Packard marking a potential layoff of 15,000 workers.

The emotional fallout from rapid, dramatic job market changes like these can severely and adversely affect the job search and job change process. It can cause inappropriate, precipitous emotional reactions that can block a job seeker's effectiveness at different times and stages of each job search.

This paper will demonstrate how individuals can find their way during emotionally difficult, uncertain times. It begins with an update on the new paradigmatic shifts that are taking place in the career world that make emotional balance more essential than ever. Then, there are some examples of counterproductive beliefs that develop during a difficult job search. Finally, the paper advocates the understanding of the importance of one's career identity in eliminating negative emotional reactions like self doubt, fear, rage, anxiety, and depression.

The material should assist business and career consultants to become sensitive to the emotional issues of the job search process. Career counselors will be offered strategies to assist clients with defining and utilizing their "career identity" while helping job changers discover their own adverse emotional reactions and counterproductive career beliefs.

Paradigmatic Career Shifts resulting from the New Economy

Last year, at the 17th California Career Conference, I pointed to nine major paradigmatic shifts that have taken place in the past few years that have not only affected how many workers feel about their jobs but have confronted the foundations of traditional theories of career and life planning. The following briefly describes those shifts and adds eight new ones to the list. Each of these affects the work of the career counselor and coach.

1. Millions of new jobs with new titles are now developed over the short term. An unpublished report released by Anderson Consulting in 2000 predicted that 10 million people will be in

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internet related jobs by the year 2002. That contrasts that with the 2.6 million workers in internet related jobs in 1998. With the dot com downturn, that may not be as accurate as once was thought. But if you add the telecom industry to the mix, the 10 million may be seen as even conservative.

2. Job searchers are now using the internet in astounding numbers. There are thousands of currently available career web sites. Individuals search, post resumes, apply for positions, and can even be interviewed on the internet. The traditional face-to-face interview is giving way to new corporate interview strategies whereby potential employees are invited to a central location where they enter a kiosk with a computer screen and respond to interview questions given forth by a "talking head." For many, this will be frightening. Career counselors will need to be practiced in advising clients how to partake in this new process.

Curiously, the internet has become a quietly effective social psychological equalizer. On the internet everything is free from age discrimination, ethnicity, social status, and religious affiliation. When potential employees send e-mails, the quality of the application, resume, and answers to e-questions are the variables that are evaluated.

3. People are tethered to their jobs and some families go so far as to suggest that they are "shipwrecked" by the new technology. The "at home" availability of broadband, fax machines, cell phones, laptops, and pagers have created a blur between work time and non work time and a gray line between work and home. More than a few stories are unceremoniously suggesting that work in the new economy is never finished.

New workaholic behavior has demonstrated a lack of balance that many people share. Ironically, one of the silver lining benefits of the slowing of the new economy has been the increase in the amount of time that aggressive workers have been willing to put into their families and relationships.

4. Work has become the "new neighborhood." We work at home and relax at work with our friends and colleagues. Some companies like the Ford Motor Company even approved of workers blending some personal issues like making childcare arrangements and phoning for doctor's appointments as they blend the work place and the home life.

Now, to be sure, this appears to be changing in 2001. Workers are going on the chopping block and screaming, "there goes the neighborhood." Workers who are left, are upset and bitter because they may need to work harder and more efficiently. And they miss their old neighbors.

5. The willingness to take risks on the job continues to be an important credential in the new economy, as companies struggle to stay competitive. Further, "failure" such as job loss or outplacement has also become an odd new credential as companies seek competitive intelligence from rivals or new upstarts who have failed. There's a premium in knowing what should not be done; workers from failed concerns have that knowledge and can assist with competitive intelligence.

6. Whether young or old, the entrepreneur continues to have a power base. Independent work has become the subject of a surge in development. 15% of today's work force now files a Form C with their yearly income tax return. College students spend some of their networking and term time work efforts in developing their own products or small businesses. Ivy league colleges are perceived as breeding grounds for new entrepreneurs and CEOs.

The new buzz word these days is that girls don't "wanna" just have fun, they "wanna" have their own businesses. A survey by Arthur Anderson suggested that only 50 percent of teen girls wanted a career in a large corporation. Rather, they want independence.

7. Reputation today may be more important than making money. Many workers want to establish a solid new reputation for themselves, where they can be characterized as visionaries. The proliferation of new computer hackers illustrates the point. As they develop their own reputations, they are also redefining success in the new economy. Reputation, not income, is their trophy.

8. With the rapidly changing economy, the tasks individuals are hired for may not necessarily be what they end up doing. Workers need a new flexibility. They need a willingness to upgrade skills through continuing education, modeling, mentoring and on the job training. While technological savvy and knowledge are important, adaptability may be the most important characteristic of the new worker. Counselors must help them with this.

The work place has become an avenue to new learning and the purveyor of continuing education. The most prosperous workers will be those who can" learn how to learn" and then apply what they've learned in imaginative ways.

9. Today's clients seem to want to work less, retire earlier, and engage in different activities which do not demand earning potential. People profess an interest in entering politics, volunteering, or serving as community agency advocates after they make their "killing" with a new IPO.

This exemplifies the "in and out" experiences of the new economy. People now go in and out of work, in and out of school, in and out of retirement, in and out of poverty, in and out of cohabitation, in and out of caregiving. Planning is more demanding than ever. Life does not seem to move in well defined stages.

10. Job changers may be shifting their companies more frequently than before, in good times and bad. But those who are shifting tend to be hired for projects as full time, but temporary employees. We've become a project driven economy. Employees are akin to external suppliers and vendors.

In California, in particular in the Silicon Valley, new employees were drawn to the soaring internet, biotech, and communications companies. Like the "49ers" and the "Oakies" before them, workers were willing to pack up and transplant themselves to find a dreamy pre IPO company. Many were sorely disappointed when venture capital funding dried up. Others were infuriated when "let go" prior to their stock options vesting. The disappointed workers may

have more trouble finding new employment; they're also becoming wary of receiving their promised compensation rights. Many are legally let go "at will" under Labor Code section 2922 which allows an employer to release an employee "with no notice and no reason."

Today's workers want a fair deal. That's the motivator. They want to feel valued and that they can have cordial relationships with their immediate bosses.

11. The new worker wants alternative scheduling, greater autonomy, more recognition, flex time, telecommuting time, health benefits for domestic partners, day care and little interference. The new manager wants to hire on the basis of the honesty and integrity of the employee first. And managers want motivated, passionate employees who understand the impact the company can have in the new economy.

To prevent burnout, older workers and baby boomers are finding ways to limit overworking and are instead becoming more planful and less reactive. They want to impact the world through their work but also with their families as well. And as they prepare for the empty nest, they want to make sure that their primary relationships are in tact.

12. The new catch phrase describing the young modern worker is that they are "lean and meaningful." With the prestige of Covey's "seven habits", a new social movement has entered the work place. Individual workers as well as their employers are bringing spirituality into the office complex. Consultants willingly address work place spirituality directly and, furthermore, there are now approximately 80 new books on the subject. Companies may offer time for community service (pro bono work), office space for spiritual meetings at work, and even time off for far ranging spiritual treks to wilderness areas and religious holy sites.

13. Organizational structures have become less hierarchical and more like a matrix. Career tracks move vertically, horizontally, in lines and in spirals. With this organizations will respond better to employees who want alternative work schedules and a greater degree of time and energy flexibility on the part of their employers.

14. The availability of the internet and the worries about the economy have led to a new type of career search called the "never ending passive job hunt." Monster.com as of this writing has over 12 million resumes on line. Job seekers keep the bait out, even when they're happy with their current job. Career counselors can take advantage of this fact with new models like Jane Goodman's "Dental Model."

15. New workers will require more due diligence before signing up with a new company. Job seekers will not only want to know how a company is performing now but how it will be performing in six months to a year from now. They will want to know what visions the investors and executive chiefs have for the company. Are the leaders trying to grow the business or sell it?

16. Todays workers may need to plan more for corporate down time. Charles Schwab has asked thousands of executives to take some time off without pay. New workers may need to plan differently.

17. Many workers, especially those with computer "know how" will remain in demand. What they will need to adjust is a lack of loyalty in the corporation. But then, many of these workers, genxers and nexters, weren't thought to be loyal in the first place.

These are major paradigmatic shifts that all career counselors, coaches, and job changers will need to attend to. But in the meantime, the shifts are eliciting a variety of negative emotional reactions.

Counterproductive Mind Sets

The rapidly changing career world and the paradigmatic shifts noted above have led to a series of potentially vexing counterproductive mind sets. Among them are feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, overwhelmingnesss, and low self esteem.

Over the years, many career counselors have felt more comfortable referring these issues to others in the mental health professions rather than rightfully assuming that this material is the bailiwick of the career counselor. Below are seven examples of the beliefs that I have thought (Chope 2000) career counselors could help clients to confront.

"My career search is a hopeless, oppressive endeavor." This seems to be a common complaint. Job seekers become paralyzed and are unable to engage in meaningful job search activities. Counselors can help clients to understand how they developed this mind set. They need to have clients give them the evidence their circumstances are hopeless. Counselors using cognitive behavioral techniques can switch roles and argue that there really is no hope while they force their clients to find areas to disagree with them.

"I'm helpless, who would hire me?" Counselors have heard this argument before but still may not assist the client in confronting it. Clients can confront this belief by partaking of one productive activity each day. Further, clients should keep a record of those activities to confront the helplessness belief. Clients can also be encouraged to try new activities that appear to be unrelated to the search. Improving eating habits, losing weight, or exercising may be suggestions to confront helplessness. Volunteering at a service club, hospital, or library may also help and these activities will serve to further cultivate the clients's network.

"I can't start at the bottom again." Job searchers need to be able to focus upon what they're going to contribute, not where they're going to start. Job changers should frame themselves as innovators. With this attitude, the changer will not be focused upon position but rather upon problem solving.

"I'll never get work." Clients tend to make the job search process a game that is either won or lost, evaluated with an all or nothing outcome. Counselors should encourage their clients to evaluate the change process. During the search, clients tend to learn more about themselves than at any other time. This is the experience they should take account of.

"I need to be certain about my search techniques." Clients need to recognize that there are no certainties in the career change process. What may emerge as the strongest asset that a client develops is the capacity to change and to be flexible, creative, fluid, and less rigid. Real learning can take place when change is embraced. There will be a new vision and a willingness to not accept things as they are.

"I feel as if I failed." Failure is almost always a part of every career search. Most are looking for a new job because they lost the one they had or there were reasons for them to make a change. To address these feelings, clients can be taught to break heir search into controllable activities, much like learning any other new activity. Most successes have come about after significant failures. Failing is simply a part of moving forward.

"I feel worthless." During the job search it's important for clients to not evaluate their self worth with other kinds of worth. Counselors can encourage clients to separate their value as a human being from their net worth . Counselors can also help clients to take a complete inventory of themselves, including a host of attributes that they probably have not considered.

By confronting counterproductive beliefs like these, career counselors can inculcate a new sense of hope in the client. A good career counselor will always and forever have one more good idea that can be a part of the change process. And while they inculcate hope, they can also help clients confront their own feelings of helplessness.

Career professionals can assist those who feel overwhelmed. Overwhelmingness can be addressed by giving up the idea of trying to accomplish every career related task at once. Clients can be taught to handle activities related to their search one step at a time. Activities can be broken into their lowest common denominator and addressed as a series of simple, discrete steps. Small changes eventually lead to larger changes. Appropriate goals can be set while avoiding the tendency to seek perfection.

There is the unfortunate tendency for career clients to undervalue their potential. The new career terrain has made many feel like they can't compete or that they will join the "wrong" firm. In order for clients to make appropriate decisions and avoid the dot bomb, they're going to have to learn a new style of research and study. They will need to screen companies, their corporate revenues, and their boards of directors. They will also need to explore and evaluate any new product or service and determine through due diligence and networking whether it appears to be something worthwhile. Curiously, they will need to learn to not jump at the first opportunity that they are offered.

With this new kind of model building, clients will experience fewer fears. These new learning strategies will address their fears of failure while preparing them for better positions in the future. While these are certainly strategies that can help career clients wade through the murkier parts of the new landscape, perhaps the two most important components to address are the establishment of the career identity and the development of the portfolio career.

Career Identity and the Portfolio Career

Two very powerful means of confronting the current job market and the emotional reactions to the job search are in the establishment of the client's career identity and the development of a portfolio career for the client.

The career identity is a somewhat complex concept that is focused upon an individual's calling. Career identity is the "kernel of all that you hope to become...the nucleus of work place confidence" (Chope 2000). It represents the accrual of experience, skills, interests, values and personal characteristics. But most people can't define who they are in the work world. If they were suddenly stopped with video camera rolling and asked to say in thirty seconds who they are in the work world, most could not.

But a strong, focused career identity, the capacity to define who you are in today's economy is empowering. A well articulated career identity can assist is preserving both interest and excitement in pursuing work in the new economy.

It can be a most interesting exercise to have clients discover their career identity. I suggest seven different approaches to the process. In sum, the equation that emerges gives a sense of purpose to a job seeker's immediate task. Knowing one's own career identity is perhaps the strongest defense against inappropriate emotional reactions during the job search process.

The following techniques can help in understanding a person's career identity:

1. Create a thirty second advertising sound bite describing who you are in the work world. This can be used to describe oneself to potential employers but can also be used to identify who you are to those who are best able to help you. After developing the sound bite, practice it so that it flows with distinction and comfort as it is passed on to others.

2. Clearly name the position you are looking for. This naming of the position ensures that you have researched the job market through resources like the web and can easily identify the kind of work that is suitable. This is the application of the identity to a specific career position.

3. Create a career genogram. The career genogram is like a family tree that shows you how and where career choice fits into the family system. It can aid in developing the career identity because it can be used to understand the origins of family expectations and judgments about careers, as well as the family's definition of success. It can help job seekers note the congruence between their expectations and those of their family. It can also suggest how the different patterns of career choice within the family have affected the choices that the job seeker has made.

4. Career identity can also be understood by determining how it was shaped through different critical life events. Using a life stage developmental approach, job seekers can examine the particular driving and restraining forces that have had an impact in developing a career identity. Within this same exercise, it is possible to explore different types of life fantasies that affected the fledgling career identity.

Fantasized careers can often resemble the idealized self. The narrower the chasm between the idealized self and the real self, the greater the possibility of experiencing both career and personal satisfaction.

5. Career identity can also be discovered through the use of the career as a developing story, sometimes referred to as the narrative approach. Basically, this approach consists of writing or tape recording your career journey as an interesting novella. The career as a story can be useful in helping a job seeker define aspirations and interests. It can also be edited and rewritten, much like a journal. And, if need be, you can write the idealized ending.

6. A study of leisure activities can serve to understand a career identity. What people love to do, they often do in their leisure time. This material can help with career exploration.

7. Finally, career identity can be explored by asking a simple question. What would you do if you won a seven million dollar lottery? Expectations of yourself, what you want to do and who you want to do it with are all wrapped up in the answer to this question.

The seven exercises that help to establish the career identity can be used in different ways during the search to eliminate self doubt, manage rage and anger, and overcome career barriers. But another component of a good career search can emerge from the career identity. This is the conceptualization and development of the portfolio career.

The portfolio career has been characterized as a composite career consisting of more than one income stream. In truth, people have had these for years. For example, people with day shift jobs may also "moonlight" from time to time. Students may work several different jobs while also attending classes in high school and college.

Developing a portfolio career allows individuals to become more flexible and less fearful in the job market. In a project driven economy they can work several projects at once.

Psychologists, for example, who have developed portfolio careers have been able to avoid some of the hassles that have resulted from the impact of the managed care industry. To illustrate, some psychologists have one income stream from practice, then add another by teaching. They may also have a third stream in executive coaching and consultation. A fourth may develop from writing while a fifth may emerge from public speaking or the delivery of keynote addresses.

As this illustrates, a portfolio career model allows for the increased security of employment. There is greater diversification, greater flexibility and a direct confrontation of anxiety and self doubt through the pinpointing of clearly identifiable market niches.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper attempts to demonstrate how emotional reactions to the job search, especially in the new economy, can adversely influence an individual's effectiveness. The paper further suggests

that career counselors and coaches can assist clients with some of the emotional aspects of the job search without referring these people to other mental health professionals.

There are new paradigmatic shifts in the career world that can have the impact of eliciting inappropriate emotional responses. Some of these major shifts are noted herein. Only by addressing the emotional barriers of the career search will people be able to be employed in the jobs they want.

A discussion of some of the emotional reactions that individuals have in the career search resulted in offering two remedies for assisting people to break through their emotional barriers. One method is the development of the career identity. The second is the establishment of the portfolio career to adjust to the new economy.

As demonstrated, therefore, career counselors need to feel that some of the emotional issues of their clients can be handled by them rather than referring them out to others. I hope this paper is a step in assisting them in that direction.

Reference

Chope, R.C. (2000). *Dancing Naked: Breaking Through the Emotional Limits that Keep You From the Job You Want*. Oakland, CA.: New Harbinger Publications.